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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Walt W. Rostow
Special Assistant to the President

The Honorable Dean Rusk
Secretary of State

SUBJECT: President Thieu's Views Regarding the Issues Involved in Agreeing to a Bombing Halt

EO 12958 3.4(b)(1)>25Yrs
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1. [redacted]

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2. [redacted] President Nguyen Van Thieu conducted business very much as usual although his main concern during the period centered around the current talks relating to a bombing halt. He discussed the situation with almost everyone who visited his office including senior Cabinet officials, aides and secretaries, and religious and political personnages. Thieu's comments to his visitors indicate two main concerns about the discussions underway. The first concern involves the status of the NLF at the negotiating table following a halt in the bombing. The second point entails Thieu's strong conviction that DRV concessions in return for a bombing halt must be spelled out and guaranteed. On both points the President is adamant and his position remains consistent throughout the reporting period.

3. The President insists he will be intransigeant against separate NLF participation in negotiations. Thieu stated that he will never negotiate with the NLF as an equal. He has no objection to their inclusion in the North Vietnamese Delegation but he will not agree to their sitting at the conference table as a separate entity. NVN and SVN have recognized governments, Thieu noted, but this is not true of the NLF, which is only a tool of Hanoi. Thieu asked, "In whose Army do the Generals of the other side hold rank?"

4. Inherent in his concern about the status of participating delegations is Thieu's obvious desire to avoid appearing to be a "U. S. lackey". At one point the President stated that Hanoi wants to meet with the U. S., the GVN and the NLF. Thieu exclaimed that this would make the GVN appear to be a U. S. front. Unless the NLF is denied equal status with the GVN, he disagrees with the American argument that Hanoi's willingness to include the GVN in the Paris talks represents a victory. Negotiating with the NLF also raises the question of honor and he has stated: there is no honor in talking to thieves, let alone the servants of thieves.

5. Thieu stated that South Vietnam could be represented at Paris either separately or jointly with the U. S. However, the question of makeup and seating of all delegations should be clearly defined ahead of time so that no confusion exists about these points.

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6. As regards a bombing halt and POW exchanges, Thieu told his Foreign Minister on [redacted] that on these issues, which are the only ones which concern the U. S., he feels the U. S. can play the leading role. Thieu noted, however, his fear that the U. S. might disassociate the bombing issue from the issue of GVN participation. The President reiterated his belief that what constitutes reciprocity should be agreed to and clearly spelled out prior to a bombing halt.

7. Thieu also sees a definite connection between the moves now underway and President Johnson's wish to see Vice President Humphrey elected. Thieu referred many times to the U. S. elections and suggested to his visitors that the current talks are designed to aid Humphrey's candidacy. Thieu has said that Johnson and Humphrey will be replaced and then Nixon could change the U. S. position.